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## I.—CONTRIBUTIONS TO A HISTORY OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE OF CANADA.

### I. PRELIMINARY. HISTORICAL.

Many surprises are in store for the scholar who for the first time goes to Lower Canada to study the people and their history, their language and their local customs, and he will generally have to begin by clearing his mind of ideas and prejudices that he has drawn from he scarcely knows where, before he can understand the past, much less the present, of this interesting folk. He has "heard" that the common man, the *habitant*, is extremely superstitious, that he speaks a patois, that he is suspicious of strangers and non-communicative, and that he has numerous amenities which belong to savage rather than to civilized beings. His nature, it is said, is so chilled by the icy winds of these northern regions that he can but imperfectly value the boon of human sympathy, and hence he is apathetic, distant in manner, morose, and altogether uninteresting. Such are a few only of the extravagant notions that must be corrected at the very beginning of his task, if the serious worker would comprehend what he finds about him. But while he is busy, by actual experience with the people themselves, in uprooting prejudices and gauging his preconceived ideas of their character to a standard of tolerable truth, he is again surprised to find the historical records of village and city so complete that, for the study not only of political but even of obscure personal history, abundant material is at hand, and this, often, down to the minutest details. Here it is not alone governmental acts that may be consulted on the faithful pages of

the originals or in copies belonging to the Departmental Bureau of Archives, but in the remotest and humblest country parish the same conscientious memorandums of village history are scrupulously preserved and spread before the student of history in the admirable church registers. So faithful and full are these documents that it has been possible for one of the most celebrated members of the Catholic church, the renowned Abbé Tanguay, of Ottawa, to write a Genealogical Dictionary of the French People of Canada. To us it is oftentimes a source of congratulation if, with all the elements of personal interest that attaches to kinship, we are able to descend the family tree for four or five generations and count its branches in unbroken succession, but in Canada the system of registration is so complete that in a single lifetime and by one man the herculean task has been accomplished of writing the genealogy of a whole people.

The meanest peasant here finds the complete record of his family history, extending back to the ancestor who left his hamlet in the old France to seek a home in the wilds of the new France. As one stands before the cases that contain the three hundred manuscript volumes of which this remarkable work is composed, each volume labelled, and to all intents and purposes ready for the printer, a feeling of deep admiration must, I think, arise in one's mind for a people who can leave to posterity such monuments of its individual life.

This land is thus, through its numerous and accurately written documents, a veritable Eldorado for the historian, and, as we shall see farther on, these favorable circumstances have developed some of the finest writers on history that our American Continent has known.

To the student of language, also, these church documents are of inestimable worth, as they enable him to follow the tangled threads of dialect influence by fixing the original home in the mother country of each family that helps to compose any given community. Fortunately for him, this labor has been shortened for the earliest periods of colonial history in the statistics collected by the celebrated historian, the Abbé Ferland, who has published, as an appendix to his *History of Canada*, the names and native towns of all the colonists that came to New France between 1615 and 1666 and whose record is preserved in the registers of Quebec and Three Rivers. This list, supplemented by the invaluable work of the Abbé Tanguay (only one volume is

published), would be sufficient to settle the original European elements that helped to make up the common Canadian speech. But, before we enter upon a critical examination of this language, it will be necessary to call to mind, as a preliminary to the study, a few leading events of the history, political, religious and social, of Canada; for here the historic growth of the people has had an influence on their language stronger than is to be found in most other places for which the original population was drawn from one and the same general linguistic territory.

The early colonists of Canada came from both North and South France, where in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the differences of dialect were more strongly marked than they are to-day; and then, almost before the fusion of these heterogeneous native elements had taken place, English was brought into contact with them, and exerted, particularly in the maritime districts, a permanent effect on both the vocabulary and word-setting of the new compound. The greater alienation from the mother country and the natural race-struggle that followed the conquest by the English in 1760 caused all the members of the Gallic stock to unite their forces against the common enemy, and this union produced again a strong tendency to uniformity of speech, furthered by the constant and intimate intercourse of the people with the clergy, who were generally the bitterest opponents to British rule. Thus the mixture, in the outset, of widely different Neo-Latin elements and the grafting on to these of Teutonic elements maintained by political supremacy, make any investigation of the language of Canada—a language common to the whole country and to the whole people, with very minor exceptions—to depend, in the first place, upon a general knowledge of those varying historical conditions through which the people have passed to their well-formed, thoroughly blended and vigorous speech of to-day.

The Cavalier King of France, François I, had just created the Collège de France (1529) and called about him many of the most celebrated scholars and artists of his age, such as Lascaris, Scaliger, Benvenuto Cellini, Andrea del Sarto and others, when his enterprising spirit pushed him to take part in the conquests of the New World, opened to Europe by Columbus. The first expedition he sent out, consisting of two small ships and sixty odd men, was put into the hands of Jacques Cartier, an intrepid navigator of Saint Malo, situated on the confines of Normandy. Cartier sailed out of

the French port St. Malo on April 20, 1534, and after a three months' voyage cast anchor in the Bay of Gaspé. Here for the first time the French set foot on American soil.<sup>1</sup>

Cartier, after having set up a cross with an inscription characteristic of his Gallic enthusiasm—*Vive le Roi de France!*—returned to his native land to report his success, and came out the following year with an increased force to extend his acquaintance with the New World. It was on this second voyage that he discovered the St. Lawrence, and spent the winter on the St. Charles river near its confluence with the St. Lawrence. He returned again to France in the following spring, and his sad winter experiences in these northern latitudes seem to have cooled for the moment the ardor of his desire for discovery, since we hear nothing of him for five years, when he set out on his third expedition with provisions for two years. Repeating the hardships of his previous sojourn on the American coast, he became discouraged and started for France the next spring, meeting off Newfoundland de Roberval, who had left Rochelle, on the borders of the Saintonge district, on the 16th of April, with a number of nobles and two hundred emigrants. These composed the first regular settlement of French in Canada. With this attempt by de Roberval to form a colony at Charlesbourg, a new and important element is introduced into these projects of French colonization. The Southern French here enter upon the scene, to play henceforth an important rôle in the commercial enterprises and in the establishment of the language of New France. His first attempt to found a colony having failed, however, de Roberval undertook a second expedition, five years later, but all were lost at sea, and then came a lull for more than a quarter of a century in the interest aroused about the French Canadian possessions. Though several expeditions were sent out during this time, it was not till 1608, when Quebec was founded by Samuel de Champlain, that a permanent foothold was taken by the French on the Saint Lawrence. The colonists had not yet been able to hold their own against the aborigines. With the latter, especially with the Algonquins and Hurons, Champlain entered into friendly relations, and thus secured for his colony immunity for the most part from those serious annoyances which had beset his predecessors.

<sup>1</sup> It was not till nearly thirty years after this (1562) that the first attempt was made by the Calvinists under Ribaut to form a colony on the coast of Florida. This expedition also came from Normandy (Dieppe).

Three years previously to this (1605), the first firm footing of the French on the American Continent had been taken in their settlement of Port Royal, now Annapolis, in Nova Scotia.<sup>1</sup> The colonists also who laid the foundation of this town were headed by two noblemen of the South, *Sieur de Monts*, and the founder of Quebec, *de Champlain*, both natives of Saintonge, the French province situated at the mouth of the Gironde river, and to-day forming approximately the Department of Lower Charente. But this was not their first voyage. In 1603 *Champlain* and a merchant, *Pontgravé*, of Saint Malo, had made, under the direction of *M. de Chates*, Governor of Dieppe at that time, a profitable expedition up the St. Lawrence, noting especially the fine harbor of Quebec. A few years earlier still, *Sieur de Monts* had visited the lower St. Lawrence, and was thus prepared to take the place of *de Chates*, who had not gone on the voyage of 1603 and who died while it was being made. Thus the chief enterprise of beginning the colonization of New France finally rested in the hands of two skilful navigators of Southern France. The one, *de Monts*, succeeded in establishing the first permanent colony at Port Royal, which afterwards drew principally from the South of France for its supplies of emigrants; the other, *de Champlain*, the "pioneer of civilization in Canada," moved up the river and planted his colony, three years later, near where *Cartier* spent the memorable winter when he discovered the St. Lawrence. Quebec, thus founded, soon became the capital of Canada, and remained so until 1867.

Not till about ten years after the choice of this site for a colony (1617) did the first family arrive with the intention of cultivating the soil.<sup>2</sup> This family, named *Hébert*, was of *Ile-de-France* origin, and consisted of five members, father, mother, two daughters and one son, who have left numerous descendants scattered throughout different parts of the present Dominion. But there was no rapid influx of colonists from the old country as might have been expected from this prosperous beginning. Only little more than two decades (1629) after the French standard had been planted on the banks of the St. Lawrence, Quebec passed into the hands of the English, its founder was taken prisoner to England, and nearly all the colonists returned to their homes in

<sup>1</sup> Manhattan river was discovered by Hudson in 1609; in 1625 Dutch colonists were sent to inhabit the island that now bears that name.

<sup>2</sup> Paul de Cazes, *Notes sur le Canada*, p. 23.

France. Only five families of what is known to-day as the *habitans* remained on the land, and one of these was this same Hébert stock just mentioned.

In 1633, Champlain returned to Canada as Governor-General, after Canada had been restored to France according to the treaty of Saint Germain-en-Laye, and made special efforts to colonise the country, but at the time of his death, two years later, the whole European population in the colony did not number over two hundred souls.

The year before Champlain's death, de la Violette had laid the foundations of a new colony ninety miles up the river, where now is situated the town of Three Rivers, and it thus seemed as though an era of prosperity were opening for the sorely tried colonists. And a little more than thirty years (1642) after Champlain took possession of the ground where now rises the "Gibraltar of America," Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, laid the foundations of Ville Marie de Montreal, where "was planted that grain of mustard seed which, in the words of the enthusiastic Vimont (who had come out from the mother country with the expedition and had been named Superior of the Jesuits of New France), would soon grow and overshadow the land."

In this connection it must be constantly borne in mind that, while the first permanent inhabitants of Quebec were from North France, those of Montreal on the contrary came, for the most part, from the South. Sieur de Maisonneuve, the founder of the latter colony, was from Champagne, it is true; but of the three vessels that constituted his original expedition, two were fitted out at La Rochelle and one at Dieppe, and this Dieppe ship contained only about a dozen men.

Another point worthy of note is that Champlain was sent out by a company whose principal object was to establish commercial relations with the Indians, and that the opening of a new field for the Christian religion was a secondary matter. With Maisonneuve, on the contrary, duty was the guiding star of life, and in the original name of the city of Montreal we have an indication that the early settlement was the result of religious enthusiasm. "It shows an attempt to found in America a veritable Kingdom of God, as understood by devout Roman Catholics."<sup>1</sup> We must keep steadily in mind also this deep religious sentiment that

<sup>1</sup> Dawson, Handbook for the Dominion of Canada, pp. 123, 149. Montreal, 1884.

animated the founders of the French colony in Canada if we would understand the extraordinary faith of this people to-day, for nowhere else perhaps has belief a stronger living power than with these our neighbors of the North.<sup>1</sup> It has justly been stated by a recent writer that "a French Canadian settlement is founded on religion and democracy." Here exists no caste-distinction when prosperity and wealth attend the thrifty habits of a peasant; "the people are one family, and in this unity lies the secret of their strength as colonists."<sup>2</sup> Here the *Angelus* continues to solve practically the labor question that is so seriously harassing almost all other Christian communities; here the dictum of the priest or bishop is sufficient in many places to make the people forego the pleasures of the dance and other innocent amusements; here is the land of miracles, where the earnest, faithful pilgrim, whether halt or blind, is restored to the full vigor of his bodily functions under the quickening energy of some saint; where the rich and the poor, the well and the sick flock by tens of thousands to holy shrines to receive the rewards of their piety in greater personal comfort or in other temporal blessings.<sup>3</sup> The necessity thus arises for the clergy to mix constantly with the masses, and this intercourse has a direct and notable influence upon the speech both of the priest and of the people.

If we now ask how many were the colonists and of what particular Departments of France were they native up to the establishment of this third colonial centre on the Saint Lawrence, we find that, at the time of the restoration of Quebec to France, in accordance with the treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, the colony did not count more than sixty members, and there were only four families regularly domiciled in the country. In the month of March 1633, Champlain, on his return to power after the treaty just mentioned, set sail from Dieppe with about two hundred persons all told. How many of these remained in the country we are not informed, but the registers of Quebec show only about seventy-five names up to the year (1641) before Maisonneuve established his colony. Of these, fifty-five, or more than two

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Johns Hopkins University Circulars, Vol. IV, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. XLVIII, p. 778.

<sup>3</sup> I joined one of these pilgrimages which numbered about six thousand people, and saw a wonder performed in the restoration of a boy to health who had withered legs due to the effects of a fever, and who had not walked for eleven years.

thirds, were from the two provinces of Normandy and Perche; while other provinces of the North, such as Picardy, Ile-de-France, Bretagne, etc., only furnished two or three colonists each. Saintonge, Poitou and Aunis (whence Roberval's expedition set out), that had furnished the chief supply for the Port Royal settlement in the East (Acadia), are here scarcely represented.<sup>1</sup> In the final establishment of these three centres of colonial development on the Saint Lawrence, Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal, we have, therefore, the spread of linguistic elements that were drawn chiefly from the North-French dialects. From this epoch forward we note the influx, through the influence especially of the Montreal settlement, of Southern French elements as represented by the Saintonge, Aunis and Poitou immigrants that spread throughout the province.

For the next quarter of a century there is a great increase of the population from the North, and the Southern additions to it have also been considerable, but not sufficient, however, to have any marked effect upon the general speech of the people. In the North, Normandy, again, has furnished the chief installment of colonists; in truth, more than double that of any other Department of France, while, for the South, Aunis has contributed the largest share of emigrants. The total supply as drawn from the whole of North France is more than five times as great as that furnished by South France during this short period. It is evident, therefore, that, for the linguistic territory representing the middle St. Lawrence, we must look especially for Northern French characteristics, for all the early period of settlement of the country. These traits of Northern French speech, blended and re-worked by clergy and people, have produced the compound which we shall have to examine farther on. We shall find, very naturally, traces of South French influence here and there, but these cannot be reckoned as a seriously disturbing element, not even where the regular Canadian French language comes into contact with speech-oases consisting of Southern French dialects, used in a few scattered villages of Acadians, such as St. Grégoire, Bécancourt, etc., that are situated on the south of the St. Lawrence, opposite Three Rivers, and thus fall in the middle zone of the territory examined.

With the first conquest (1629) of Canada by the English (Quebec then meant Canada), not only was a check given to

<sup>1</sup> Ferland, *Cours d'Histoire du Canada*, Première Partie, 1534-1663, Appendix C, p. 511.

immigration, but, as we have seen, the great majority of those who had settled in New France returned to their native country. After the restoration of Canada to France, as noted above, the current again set in from the mother country, and continued to flow uninterruptedly till another break came by foreign occupation in 1760. It is true that the first interruption was only temporary, but in the nascent state of the colony at that time it was destined to set back the growth of French influence on the St. Lawrence for many years. We thus see that in Canada, for a little more than a century and a quarter, the French were left to themselves, and by natural increase and constant immigration their number had increased from the half-dozen families after the restoration in 1632, to about sixty thousand souls at the conquest in 1760. We have noticed what a long series of ineffectual attempts followed the discovery of the St. Lawrence in 1535, before a final permanent settlement was made on its borders three-quarters of a century later (1608); in truth, for at least one hundred and fifty years after the discovery of the country the growth of the population was almost nothing. It was particularly the two or three generations preceding the conquest, that is, during the last quarter of the sixteenth century and in the first half of the seventeenth century, that the germs were securely planted in Canada for the development of a stable and important French population. By natural increase and by immigration the rapid growth of the colony was assured, and yet when the English came to cut off suddenly this continued development from outside sources the colony numbered a few tens of thousands only. Immigration from the native land then ceased, and since that date the country has had to depend on its own resources for increase of population. This increase must appear phenomenal when we remember that during the last century and a quarter the numbers have grown to be more than thirty-three times what they were when immigration ceased, that is, the French people of Canada and their immediate offspring now number about two millions, including the half a million who have settled in the United States.

It was, then, during the century that immediately preceded the introduction of English rule into Canada that the French element rapidly developed, not only from the sources within itself, but also from immigration from the mother country, whence a strong current was pouring in to swell the colonial material. The surrender to the English of the city of Quebec on Sept. 18, 1760,

gave the final blow to French domination on the American Continent. This is a date to be kept in mind, as it brings in the third linguistic element hinted at above, which henceforth is to exercise an important influence on certain parts of the language territory already covered by the French. The speech of the latter had remained pure, for the most part, up to this time. Though the Indian population in Canada amounted to many thousand souls, they were separated into so numerous tribes and tribal divisions that their dialects have had almost no sensible effect on the French grammar, and have contributed here and there only a few words to the original French vocabulary. Now that the English was introduced and supported by official authority, in addition to that natural mixture of native French dialects that would come about by commercial intercourse, we have a second foreign element, whose disturbing influence is especially felt in the maritime districts where the British principally settled.

In 1653, fifty years after the arrival on the coast of Acadia (Nova Scotia) of the first French colonists in America, the total population of Canada did not surpass 2500 inhabitants of European origin.<sup>1</sup> When the first census was taken a dozen years later, it was found that, throughout the territory occupied by the French, there were only 538 families, representing 3215 inhabitants. A hundred and fifty years had elapsed since the first settlement in Acadia (1604), and the total French element amounted (1754) to only about 55,000 souls, and, on the formal cession of Canada to England in accordance with the Treaty of Paris a decade after this (1763), the white population was counted at scarcely 65,000 souls. With this occupation of the country by the British there was naturally a great influx of English into the newly acquired possessions, so that, when the first census was taken by the English government five years (1765) after the fall of Quebec, the population had increased with surprising rapidity, marking an increment of about twenty thousand on the numbers they had found in the land, and ten years later (1775) again, the population had reached ninety thousand, or an average growth of two thousand per annum since the occupation. In these fifteen years, then, we find the population had increased by about one-third, and the new element that had been poured into it was English.<sup>2</sup> The French were restricted to natural development within themselves, since the

<sup>1</sup> De Cazes, *Notes sur le Canada*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> De Cazes, *Notes sur le Canada*, p. 62; *ibidem*, p. 85.

conquest was the signal, as we have noted, for all immigration from France to cease. In order to exercise a better control over the discordant elements, arising from difference of race, the English government divided the colony in 1791 into two divisions, Upper and Lower Canada. The whole colony at this time counted a hundred and thirty-five thousand inhabitants, of whom about fifteen thousand were English, and of this English population Upper Canada had ten thousand only. It was about this time, too, *i. e.* between 1784-90, that the population of Montreal began to surpass that of Quebec. The former counted 18,000, the latter 14,000 inhabitants. Towards the beginning of the present century (1806) the relation of Lower to Upper Canada in point of population was about three and one-half to one, and it was not till the middle of the century that we have the balance turned in favor of Upper Canada. In 1861 Upper Canada had gone ahead of its sister by nearly three hundred thousand, and this superiority in numbers gave, of course, to the English-speaking element a great advantage over the French, in that the legislative representation was based upon the population. The Act of Confederation in 1867, three-quarters of a century after the division of the colony, put an end to the struggle between the two sections, in that it gave to each independence with reference to everything that pertains to questions of local administration.

The province of Quebec counts now 254,841 families, composed of 678,175 men and 689,852 women. From this it will be seen that the population of men and women is about the same, and that the average to each family is more than five members.<sup>1</sup> Large families, in truth, are the rule everywhere. Mr. Ouimet, the present able Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Province of Quebec, is the twenty-sixth child in his family, and it is a most common thing to find families of twenty-five to thirty children by the same mother. A race, whether of the Latin or of any other stock, which has been known to celebrate fourteen golden weddings at one time in a single parish is not likely ever to be anglicised or stamped out by royal edicts. But this prolificness is the simple continuance of a state of things that was encouraged by the early colonisers and rulers of the province. Colbert provided the colonist with a wife and did everything in his power to encourage large families by royal premiums. A royal gratuity of twenty francs was given to young men who married at twenty years or

<sup>1</sup> Paul de Cazes, *Notes sur le Canada*, p. 91.

under, and to girls who found husbands before they were sixteen. It was no uncommon thing in these early days for the united ages of the bride and groom to fall short of thirty years. A premium of three hundred francs was awarded to parents with ten living children, and of four hundred to those who had twelve<sup>1</sup> children.

As a natural effect of this rapid increase in population, we find a gradual uprooting of the weaker race in point of numbers, that is, the English. Nor is it to the west alone, as with the people of the United States, that the French race is spreading. Masters of the lower St. Lawrence, they are daily penetrating farther and farther to the east and south. In four counties of New Brunswick: Victoria, Ristigouche, Gloucester, and Kent, they already have more than ten thousand majority.

Repatriation societies have been established, and are actively at work to bring back those who have gone forth to seek new homes in the United States. Thousands of good, thrifty citizens have thus been restored to their native stock, whose force they materially increase in the determined race struggle that is now going on in Canada. One of the principal centres of this species of colonisation is Sherbrook, established as a diocese in 1874 for Mgr. Racine (Antoine), formerly of Quebec, the initiator of this important movement. Two decades ago Sherbrook was a small English village of no importance whatever; it now numbers, through the efforts of the Repatriation Society, nearly eight thousand inhabitants, of whom more than three-fourths are French. It is no wonder, then, in view of these facts, that some enthusiastic French writers should have proclaimed the superiority of Franco-Canadian colonisation over that of the English. Wherever the Canadian Frenchman settles he clings to the soil, never abandoning his foothold, and eventually assimilates his brother colonist of Anglo-Saxon blood, unless the latter withdraws entirely and gives up his home to the all-absorbing Gaul.

The French population now occupies seven-eighths of Lower Canada. The English element, after a hard fight, has virtually renounced the struggle to hold the province, and, discouraged, has retired or is rapidly retiring from this part of the field. The wonderfully absorbing power of the French element has here produced the curious phenomenon of a people, in certain parts of the country, who bear all the racial characteristics of the English

<sup>1</sup> The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. XLVIII, p. 773.

or Scotch, such as the blue eyes, light hair, florid faces, and who have the name of Warren, Fraser, McDonald, McPherson, etc., but also are still unable to speak a word of the mother tongue. The English names of roads, of towns, of counties, give abundant proof as to who were the occupants of the soil a few years ago. To-day it is the offspring of the Gallic stock that possess the land. Their unswerving purpose, encouraged by the clergy, is to take back their old domains by the peaceful process of repopulating them with descendants of their own blood, and, at the present rate of increase, we may safely predict that it will not be many generations before they shall have accomplished this unique feat.

At Montreal the French element is progressing apace. Though the population (about one hundred and fifty thousand) is here pretty nearly balanced between the French, on the one hand, and the different race elements, such as English, Scotch, Irish, etc., on the other, yet the number of children is more than double in favor of the Gaul, being as 65 : 32 of all other nationalities. It is evident, therefore, that in a few generations, if this condition of things continues, the French will be in an overwhelming majority.<sup>1</sup> If we pass a little farther to the west we find that two counties of Upper Canada, Russell and Prescott, have already fallen into the hands of the French, and they number now more than a hundred thousand souls in this province. But nowhere else, perhaps, is the spread of the Gallic race more marked than in the town of Ottawa, Capital of the Dominion. Here, after hardly a dozen years of existence, the town began to turn French, so that now it is more French than English. The *habitant*, having thus crossed the line between Upper and Lower Canada, is marching westward through the counties mentioned above, and northward up the valley of the Ottawa river. He has planted settlements in the fertile prairie region of the Saskatchewan, a river that affords 1500 miles of steamboat navigation. The comparatively new English settlements of the eastern townships are being overrun. "Somerset becomes Saint-Morisette; Stamford, Sainte-Folle; Boulton, Bouton; as parish after parish is invaded by the race which England thought she had effaced on the Plains of Abraham. They have swarmed over the boundary between Canada and the United States, and the sixty-five thousand peasants left to shift for themselves in the abandoned colony that Voltaire described as 'a few arpents of snow' have increased to so great a degree out of their own loins that now 'the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Le Correspondant*, 1877, p. 292.

land is filled with them.'"<sup>1</sup> It has been very properly suggested, with reference to them, that "if at this present time the French race manifests a vitality in Canada as mysterious to its enemies as to the Frenchmen of the France to-day, it is because of the imperishable power of the self-sacrifice and heroism of so many of those men, laymen as well as clerics, who planted the standard of France on the shores of the St. Lawrence."

An important feature of external influence upon the language must be noted in the seigniorial tenure which prevailed for about two centuries and a half throughout Lower Canada. This feudal institution of France, which was introduced into the new country in order to favor colonisation, with the various modifications that were wrought in it to suit local usages, proved to be an admirable system for the creation of a peasant proprietary. The seigneurs were generally the second sons of noble families, who chose the better class of peasants to accompany them to their homes in America, and here each ruler laid out on the river his little kingdom, generally one-half by three leagues in dimensions, and as he was compelled to lease and sell, his own private estate thus never became excessively large. His land was divided among his colonists in concessions of three by thirty arpents. This arrangement produced a series of centres of civilisation in which the lord and his educated friends were brought into intimate contact with the common people; in truth, we have abundant evidence to show that the relation of the seigneur to his people was much more intimate in these early settlements of Canada than in the mother country. But it was not the seigneurs alone who belonged, for the most part, to the highest nobility. Mgr. de Laval-Montmorency, Bishop of Petraea, was sent to Canada to fill the office of Apostolic Vicar. He was the first Bishop of Quebec, after whom the celebrated University Laval of Quebec was named in 1854, and was of pure Montmorency blood; ladies of rank and fortune were the founders and patrons of the first religious establishments in the country, among which were the Hôtel-Dieu at Quebec, established by the Duchess d'Aiguillon, and the Convent of the Ursulines, founded by Madame de la Peltrie, a beautiful young widow of Alençon. The governors and other state officers were of the highest nobility. It is not strange therefore, considering these circumstances, that the effects of association with persons of the best culture should have remained in the manners of the *habitant* up to this day. He had,

<sup>1</sup> Atlantic Monthly, Vol. XLVIII, p. 771.

both from the side of the clergy and from that of his rulers, a marked advantage over his brother at home, and his speech bears especial traces of this influence in its near approach, in word-supply and construction, to the literary language of that age.

After the conquest by the English (1760), several thousand colonists, mostly the seigneurs and their families, returned to France, but the feudal tenure was continued down to 1854, when it was abolished at a cost of several millions of dollars to the United Provinces. A few years before the abolition of the seigniorial title, statistics show that more than two hundred seigneurs existed in the country. Thus was extinguished an institution that had been formally established in 1627, when by royal charter the rule of the colony was vested in the Hundred Associates. This long continuance of a system that directly and unceasingly affected the life of the *habitant* must naturally leave strong and indelible traces on his character, and almost equally marked effects upon his language. By the departure of the nobles, as just noted, the line of demarcation between the upper and lower elements of society became much less stable, and all classes were more thoroughly mixed than they had ever been before. Besides this we must remember that the colonists were facing a common enemy, and a union of their interests was a necessity. Thus originated that unity of feeling which has been fostered among the French people of Canada in all their fierce struggles for more extensive privileges and better protected rights, and thus it is too that the several attempts to deprive them of their dearest heritage, their religion and their language, have been utter failures. For the last century and a quarter the French nationality of Canada has grouped itself about the clergy, who have always been its most energetic defenders. "The history of the priesthood is the history of the country." At the time the English conquered Canada, elementary instruction was chiefly in the hands of the Jesuits, with whom it remained up to 1800, when their property was confiscated by the Government, the parish schools were closed, and it was not till 1841 that the church got back into her power the primary education of the people. The crusade, in this case, against Catholic instruction was carried to so great an extreme that the influence of the clergy was declared to be subversive of all established government. The clergy, however, ever faithful to their mission as the guardians and educators of youth, not only held to their rights, but pushed the principle of separate schools until they

triumphed in 1863, and now the Catholics have their instruction separate from the Protestants throughout Lower Canada.

The plan of work here carried out in collecting material for a treatment of the French language of Canada was to select certain localities that would serve as bases to move from. These were convenient in this case, as the ends of the linguistic line chosen and its middle point were also the original settlements established on it, that is, Montreal, Three-Rivers, and Quebec, which I took as so many natural centres of growth, and worked out towards the circumference or limits of the region examined, extending back in some cases to more than fifty miles from the St. Lawrence river. Beginning with the west I moved east, covering the main peculiarities of language in the valley of the St. Lawrence from Montreal to Quebec. To the west of Montreal, as far as Ottawa, I was able to collect a few data bearing upon the gradual mixture of the French and English; to the east of Quebec my observations were extended to a few points on the north side of the river down as far as the small village St. Tite, about forty miles distant. The distance between the two extremes of this working line measures exactly one hundred and eighty miles, and will doubtless appear to those unacquainted with the linguistic territory as far too extensive to be characterized with even a moderate degree of accuracy. To this doubt I must reply that, acting the part of pioneer, my chief object was to gather the leading features of the language, and thus establish the main local characteristics which are necessary to be known before individual centres can be worked out with profit. In doing this, to my great surprise, I found a uniformity of speech for this whole district which must impress, as little less than wonderful, every one who has been accustomed to note the great and often puzzling differences of idiom that exist in European countries. The causes that produced this sameness of word-form and expression are often complex, as will be seen when we come to the treatment of different parts of the language. The social and political influences, religious and race antipathies, glanced at above, have done much to weld together the otherwise discordant elements of this population and produce a homogeneity that is truly characteristic, if we consider the variety of elements that constituted the original native society. Their effects are easily traceable in the community of language of the *habitant* and the city bred, of the uneducated and the learned.

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